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S E R M O N

PREACHED AT

WITHAM, IN THE COUNTY OF ESSEX,

BEFORE THE

LORD BISHOP OF LONDON,

AT HIS VISITATION HELD THERE,

MAY 29, 1794.

By R. ORMEROD, M.A.

LATE DOMESTIC CHAPLAIN TO HIS LORDSHIP,

PUBLISHED BY DESIRE OF HIS LORDSHIP.

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S E R M O N.

I TIM. iv. 16.

TAKE HEED TO THYSELF, AND TO THY
DOCTRINE, CONTINUE IN THEM, FOR
IN DOING THIS, THOU SHALT BOTH
SAVE THYSELF, AND THEM THAT HEAR
THEE.

THESE words are calculated to remind
us of the great end of our ministry,
which is of such importance, both to our-
selves, and mankind, that we cannot be too
diligent in furnishing every incitement to the
due performance of it.

If we consider the character of him, to
whom the Apostle gives the charge, in the
text; one, who from a child, had known the

holy Scriptures, had afterwards the gift of prophecy, and was endued with extraordinary qualifications; we shall readily acknowledge, that even the most able instructors, those most distinguished both for their learning and piety, may, with great propriety, be exhorted in the same words.

The end of our appointment is now the same, as it was then, the salvation of mankind; the means to attain this end, are the same, example and instruction.

Nor are the difficulties attending the discharge of this important duty so much diminished now that Christianity is established in the world, as to render attention and vigilance unnecessary. On the contrary, to such a degree have the minds of men lately been agitated, on the great subject of religion, that perhaps no age, since the apostolic, has called for greater abilities, greater zeal, and more exemplary conduct in the preachers of the Gospel *.

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* We have in the *best ages* much vice to reform, much ignorance to enlighten, much wilfulness to subdue,—but
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If therefore, in the following discourse, the duties of our order, be insisted on with some degree of plainness and particularity, it is hoped the freedom will be excused, when it is considered, that the object is by no means to dictate; but merely to propose such arguments, as may the better dispose us to fulfil the ends of our appointment, and make us instruments of good to mankind—promoters of peace and order, in the kingdom to which we belong: and above all, faithful dispensers of those truths and doctrines, which will, through the blessing of God, render both ourselves and our hearers happy, and “*wise unto salvation.*”

The duties of our profession are comprised, by the Apostle in the text, under two heads, viz. attention to our deportment, and to our instructions.

I. The direction and government of our own conduct, is placed first in point of order. —“*Take heed to thyself.*” And seemingly, in these times, how is the arduous task increased—how are our best exertions called for!—See Dr. Rennel’s Sermon on Gaming.

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with good reason ; for, on the due regulation of our own behaviour, must depend, in a considerable degree, the success of our instructions.

It was an opinion of some of the wisest amongst the Heathens, that an orator, if he would *persuade*, must be a good man *. And, it is particularly true with respect to the *Christian* orator, who is always supposed to practise himself, what he enforces upon his audience. He may fail, even with real goodness, for want of other qualifications ; but without this, he can never expect to succeed. He is required to be “ an example to his flock ; ”—to lead them in the way of their duty.—The Apostle’s advice to Titus was, “ *In all things shew thyself an example, or pattern of good works.*” Titus ii. 7.

Now, an example should necessarily have somewhat in it superior and excellent ; it should clearly delineate and exhibit the several virtues intended to be formed in those who are to copy it. Hence the lives and

* Non posse oratorem esse, nisi virum bonum.

CICERO.

conduct of the Clergy are expected to display a correctness and accuracy, which are not so much looked for in other men. THEY have set themselves apart from the rest of the world, and are devoted to the immediate service of God. And though they are subject to passions and infirmities, in common with others, yet are they guarded by stronger obligations, and actuated by more powerful motives.

The study of the Holy Scriptures (which, though the duty of all, yet is more peculiarly *their* province) has an immediate tendency to impress the mind with pious sentiments, and to fortify it against the assaults of temptation, while it furnishes knowledge necessary for the purpose of public instruction.

The solemn engagement also made, at our ordination, to rebuke vice, and turn men from the error of their ways, ought to have a powerful and lasting effect upon our hearts, and form a strong barrier against the allurements of sin. Hence, though the due discharge of our office is certainly attended with many difficulties; yet our situation, the studies,

dies, and mode of living proper for our profession, greatly assist us in surmounting them. “ And in this, as a pious Prelate of our Church has justly observed, the Clergy have one great advantage over the rest of the world; that whereas even the proper business and occupations of other men, frequently prove the cause of great distractions, and expose them to temptations, diverting them from their great concern, “ *the one thing needful* ;” it is quite otherwise with the Clergy ;—the more diligently they attend to the studies peculiar to their profession, the more they advance their own particular welfare and happiness ; every part of their office, when duly performed, excites good thoughts, and brings good ideas into the mind, and tends both to increase their knowledge, and to quicken their sense of divine things.”

Therefore, whenever they fail in their duty, fewer allowances must be made ; their errors will be considered as less excusable, than those of other men ; and vices, if they should be guilty of any, will in them be greatly aggravated ; because they depart more from
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their proper character. Not that absolute perfection is to be expected from us, and that we should fall into no mistakes, or inadvertencies. But we ought to guard as much as possible against them, for the sake of that holy religion, which we have engaged to promote and establish; that we may give "*no occasion to those who seek an occasion against us*; but may, *in all things*, adorn our profession, and approve ourselves as the ministers of God *."

Our conduct is strictly and constantly observed;—many things, to which we may be inattentive, are remarked, to our disadvantage. Bad men have their eyes upon us, to discover our defects; and they will triumph at our failings: good men regard us with an eye of favour and approbation, and in order to imitate our virtues.—In the one case, our misconduct will be a discouragement to the well-disposed and religious; in the other, it will give a manifest advantage to the advocates for infidelity.

* 2 Cor. vi. 3, 4. xi. 12.

Whatever may have been the state of religion in former days, it is obvious, that the present age has a character peculiar to itself; a singular arrogance of impiety, an infidelity of an uncommon size and complexion, which contents not itself with combating particular points, or articles of the Christian faith, but with an unusual boldness and confidence, attacks the sacred book itself, denying its authenticity and divine original. These adversaries of revelation and religion, are unremitting and indefatigable in their exertions to make profelytes, nor are they likely to be discouraged from their impious attempts; if the teachers of Christianity appear inactive and unconcerned spectators, or what must prove still more favourable to such wicked designs, if they should, in any respect, be exceptionable in their moral characters, contradict and destroy, by their conduct, what they are bound to enforce in their public exhortations *.

* This point has lately been urged by the enemies of the Ecclesiastical Establishment, in a neighbouring kingdom, as justifying the annihilation of the clerical order.

A light and frivolous behaviour is perhaps no recommendation to *any* character, but it acquires *a degree of guilt* when it appears in the Clergy, as it tends to weaken, and in a manner to annihilate, the force of every serious admonition; for who will believe that we feel the importance of the exhortations we deliver, if levity betray itself in our manners and conversation*? There is a manly seriousness, perfectly consistent with cheerfulness, and far removed from gloom and moroseness, which are as carefully to be avoided as the other extreme,—this let us endeavour to attain.—

An attachment to the amusements and luxuries of life, an ambition of appearing

* The world judges very much of men by their outward appearance.—It never looks for much gravity in the mind, if too much levity is visible in the person.—If the article of dress is much attended to, men naturally suspect that severer studies have been neglected.—Of these things, the Laity are as competent judges as the Clergy, and they will judge for themselves, whether we give them leave or not.

Bp. HORNE's Charge.

conspicuous in every scene of fashionable resort, will never add, either lustre, or dignity to our characters:—among the laity, many, from the nature of their situations and connexions with the world, are drawn into a much larger share of its dissipations, than is agreeable to their inclinations, or consistent with their happiness; but this can never be necessary for us, whose station in society not only makes such compliances needless, but highly improper.—They will ever tend to degrade our characters, and expose us to the scorn, even of the greatest libertines.

Nor are we required to be on our guard, merely against the allurements of pleasure, and the influence of fashion; but against temptations, which, at some periods of life, and in some constitutions more especially, operate with peculiar force; against *secular* pursuits, and, “*being overcharged with the cares and concerns of this life.*”

Here, “*our moderation should be known unto all men* *.” And, as regulating our affections

* Phil. iv. 5.

for temporal things will leave our minds more at liberty, for the discharge of our professional duties, so will it give greater weight and effect to all our instructions. It will dispose us to rest satisfied, and contented with our own state and condition. It will teach us to be peaceable and faithful subjects; and whatever sentiments we, at any time, may happen to entertain respecting affairs of a public nature; whether in our private opinions we coincide, or disagree with the measures adopted by those in power, we shall ever be cautious, how we interpose, in "*matters that are too high for us*:" but above all, shall ever be restrained, from endeavouring to overthrow, or injure that government, under which we live, and to which, we have sworn allegiance and good faith.

On the contrary, we shall feel it to be our bounden duty, at all times, and particularly in times of difficulty and sedition, like the present, to use all our influence, and to bring together all the powerful motives of the Gospel, in order effectually to impress on the hearts of our hearers, the important duties
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of obedience and subjection to the King, and to all that are put in authority under him.

The sphere, in which we are to move, and in which we shall best distinguish ourselves, lies not in the public but in the private; in the silent and retired walks of life. —It is more humble, but not less honourable. —It lies within the limits of the respective parishes committed to our charge. —Here, we shall always find an ample field for exertion, and the exercise of our talents. In discovering objects of charity;—in acts of kindness and benevolence;—attending to the wants of the poor,—visiting and comforting the sick—alleviating the distresses of the afflicted—reproving the profane;—instructing the young and inexperienced;—encouraging and animating the virtuous.—These duties will always furnish abundant employment, even for the most active minds:—in the discharge of which, the more diligent and industrious we are, the more truly amiable and respectable we shall appear. And the inward comfort and satisfaction arising from the conscientious performance of these duties, will be such,

such, as can be derived from no other source whatsoever.

II. *Take heed unto thy doctrine.*

The word here rendered doctrine, comprehends every thing which we are required to deliver, as public instruction; which may properly be divided into two parts: the neo, respecting matters of faith; the other, respecting moral duties.

The latter of these will occupy a considerable place in our discourses, as it did in those of our blessed Lord, and his apostles. The former, will nevertheless require to be clearly explained and urged, as the foundation, on which true christian morality must be built. A particular stress being laid (in the New Testament) on the motives, from which moral duties are to proceed.

That we may be able to place the points of faith and practice in their true light, a considerable proportion of our time must be employed in theological pursuits. The Scriptures must be read and examined with care and with a critical eye. These are the sacred
4 records,

records, from which the words of truth and knowledge are to be derived. These will supply us with armour, against the profane attacks of infidels ; will furnish arguments, by which we may excite men to repentance ; and by a true knowledge and application of them, we shall alone be enabled to contend for the faith once delivered to the Saints.

It is from these, that our public instructions must be drawn ; every thing we deliver should be authorised from the Scriptures, otherwise we shall deserve, and shall incur the censure passed by our blessed Lord, on the Scribes and Pharisees, “ of teaching for doctrines, the opinions and traditions of men.”

A primary qualification then, indispensably necessary for giving religious instruction, is a knowledge of the Scriptures : with these, such an acquaintance should be cultivated and obtained, as shall furnish a clear, full, and comprehensive view of the whole scheme of revelation ; that being thoroughly instructed (from the prophecies in the Old Testament, to their completion) *unto the kingdom of*

of heaven, we may occasionally unfold, and dispense the doctrines and duties necessary to salvation; bringing forth, out of the treasury of our minds, things *new* and *old*.

Of the practical and preceptive parts of Scripture, it will be no difficult matter to acquire a general knowledge, and, full as much care and attention, may perhaps be required to explain, as to acquire them. For, if the moral duties are not stated in a clear and interesting manner, and placed on their true and proper foundation, there will be danger, lest our audience should imagine themselves Christians, without being actuated by Christian motives *. These are, the love of God, a desire to please him, and an endeavour in all our actions to glorify his name through Jesus Christ.

Christ, whose ministers we are, should ever be kept in view, as the great object both of our faith and imitation. The remembrance

* Many of our Clergy have lost themselves in the estimation of their hearers, by delivering cold, inanimate Lectures, on Moral Virtue, independent of Christianity. Bp. HORNE's Charge. See Achrbp. SECKER's Charges.

of his unparalleled love, his compassion, his sufferings and death, for the children of men, will affect the heart in the most powerful way, and have a peculiar tendency to promote obedience and purity of life, especially when it is considered, that it is through his mediation and intercession, that we obtain pardon of sin and acceptance with God.

Entirely free from every thing enthusiastic, there is a plain, impressive, and scriptural method of explaining and enforcing the doctrine of the redemption, which, wherever it is adopted, will, through the blessing of God, be productive of the best effects: the sober and rational Christian will thereby be edified and improved; profane and vicious persons may be convinced and reclaimed; enthusiasm abated; and primitive piety, in some degree, revived and restored.

Other modes of instruction may, to some, indeed appear more interesting and more agreeable; but to none, are they likely to become so generally useful and effectual, to the great purposes of repentance and salvation; the end of all religious instructions.

For

For let the refined speculatist reason, with all his acuteness, and all his ingenuity, on rectitude of conduct, and the practice of what is right, from the love of it; let him paint vice, in all its native deformity, and place virtue, in the most amiable point of view, all his eloquence, all his ornaments of style and arts of persuasion, will fail of producing the proper effect. He may amuse the scholar and delight the philosopher; but neither of them will he ever persuade to relinquish one favourite sin. His refined speculations, even where they are best understood and most admired, will act but with feeble force; and they will never be able effectually to reform the heart, or to curb the impetuosity of passion:—motives of a much higher nature than such reasonings as these can furnish, will be necessary to produce the desired effect.

But admitting that such refined and abstracted speculations could influence the generality of men, so as to be a restraint on their passions, and lead them to the practice of morality; this, however excellent in itself, would not be the morality of a Christian.

The motives to our actions, the temper of mind, the heart, is regarded by him, who must certainly be allowed to have the right of appointing the terms of our obedience and acceptance.

What is here asserted, might be demonstrated, were it necessary, from a variety of passages in the sacred writings. And the history of Cornelius *, will not perhaps be thought improperly adduced to illustrate the point in question. He was a devout man, and his prayers and his alms had ascended before God as a memorial: they were accepted, as performed according to the light and knowledge he then had: but how acceptable soever they were, while he remained in the condition of a Jewish proselyte, it was necessary, that by additional knowledge and faith, he should be made a Christian.

Accordingly St. Peter was divinely appointed to instruct him in the great and distinguishing principles and doctrines of Christianity.

* Acts x.

And,

And, even in Christian congregations, at *present*, it will be frequently necessary to insist upon the “ *principles of the doctrines of Christ.*” Too generally is it taken for granted, that our hearers are acquainted with these points; whereas many of them are astonishingly ignorant and uninformed: having the name of Christians, without knowing why they are so denominated; in which state of ignorance they must ever remain, if they are not repeatedly, and from time to time, instructed in the articles of their *belief*, and taught to “ *look unto Jesus, as the author and finisher of their faith* *.”

Whatever new systems of doctrine, and of preaching, these enlightened times, this *age of reason*, may have produced; the doctrine of the cross, is the only doctrine able to make men wise unto salvation, and it will still maintain its ground; it is built on a rock, and will stand firm and stedfast, against all the opposing theories of philosophers and speculating men.

Yet though we have a firm trust in the ex-

* Heb. xii.

press declaration and promise of our blessed Saviour himself, that his religion shall remain in the world, till it shall finally prevail over all opposition, when the kingdoms of this world, shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ; nevertheless, before this happy period shall arrive, a great and extensive apostacy may happen; and ignorance and darkness be permitted to overspread particular kingdoms, for their wickedness and unbelief; and as judgments for their obstinate neglect and abuse of the Gospel.

Such has already been the fate of Christianity in almost all those countries and nations, where it was first promulgated and established.

And to a similar punishment and dereliction of God and Revelation, may we, of this long-favoured and happy island, at last be condemned, if we will not repent of our errors, and “*know the day of our visitation:*” —if we suffer ourselves to be misled and corrupted by that false philosophy, that pride of human reason, which, in a neighbouring
king-

kingdom, exalts itself against every thing that is called God.

Let *us*, however, who are appointed to preserve this heavenly treasure, be diligent, faithfully to perform our part. Let it not be said, when our professional exertions are peculiarly necessary, and our good example most wanted, that we desert our post, and betray the cause of truth.

On the contrary, when our holy religion is so openly and confidently attacked, and such indefatigable zeal and activity are exercised to draw men from *the old paths*, let it be our ardent desire, and our most earnest endeavour, to preserve both ourselves, and the people committed to our charge, from the dangerous contagion.

Let us not be discouraged by difficulties, nor shrink from the arduous duties of our profession. If our work be arduous, and our difficulties great, let us not on this account, either fear, or be dismayed; but let us trust in the promises of God for strength and support; constantly pray, through faith in Christ, for his blessing upon our respective labours,

for the advancement of virtue and christian piety.

Then, whatever may be our success with respect to others, we shall enjoy the inexpressible satisfaction of having saved our own souls, and, in due time, shall receive our reward.

“They that are wise, shall shine as the
“brightness of the firmament, and they that
“turn many unto righteousness, as the stars
“for ever and ever *.”

* Dan. xii. 3.

10 JAN 68

F I N I S.

